

Checklist for Medical Issues When Traveling Overseas

Before the Trip

- A written confirmation from an appropriate manager, i.e., a Travel Authorization or memorandum, that identifies the employee and country(ies) that will be visited should be provided the medical support staff **4-8** weeks prior to the trip or, if less than 4 weeks, as soon as management or the employee becomes aware of it.
- The medical staff will identify what vaccinations are recommended for each country and discuss the current health issues for each country with the employee. Some vaccinations take several weeks to become effective.
- The medical staff will review and update the employee's routine and specific vaccinations needed (for travel of 60 days or more, the Department of State will provide a medical clearance).
- The employee should review his/her health plan to determine if it is adequate for traveling overseas or whether the plan should be changed.
- The medical staff should discuss what steps the employee should take if s/he becomes ill or is injured while on travel.
- The Departmental element should determine whether short-term health coverage should be provided (the Department currently contracts with MEDEX Assistance Corporation at a nominal cost per employee per trip; employees should check with their Administrative support staffs as to whether or not they are covered).

During the Trip

- If the employee becomes seriously ill or is incapacitated, the employee should notify his/her supervisor and, if covered, contact MEDEX directly for assistance; worldwide phone numbers are on the employee's MEDEX identification card.
- The employee is expected to pay for any medical, dental, or hospitalization expenses in conjunction with his/her health plan; however, for major expenses, the Departmental element may establish a fund to cover them subject to reimbursement from the employee.
- If the employee dies and the employee is covered by the MEDEX contract, the Departmental element should contact MEDEX for assistance in transporting the employee's remains back to the United States; if the employee is not covered, then the employee's family has the responsibility for working through the local State Department consulate and to make arrangements with an agency like MEDEX.

After the Trip

- If the employee has concerns or symptoms typical of the contagious diseases that have been identified for the country(ies) visited, the employee should report them to the medical staff and should be placed on excused absence/administrative leave until
 - such time as the employee's condition has either been determined by his/her personal physician to not be contagious, or
 - the employee can return to duty.

- If a serious contagious disease is confirmed, then the medical staff should be notified promptly and the employee should report to that staff upon returning to duty to be “cleared” for duty.
- If the condition is not serious, but the employee is not well enough to return to duty, then the employee’s leave status should be changed to sick or annual leave or leave without pay, as appropriate.

Health and Wellness Tips for Travelers

All travelers should take the following precautions, no matter the destination:

- Wash hands often with soap and water.
- Because motor vehicle crashes are a leading cause of injury among travelers, walk and drive defensively; avoid travel at night if possible and always use seat belts.
- Don’t eat or drink dairy products unless you know they have been pasteurized.
- Never eat undercooked ground beef and poultry, raw eggs, and unpasteurized dairy products; raw shellfish is particularly dangerous to persons who have liver disease or compromised immune systems.
- Don’t eat food purchased from street vendors; do not drink beverages with ice.
- Don’t handle animals, including dogs and cats, to avoid bites and serious diseases.

Travelers to rural or undeveloped areas should take the following precautions:

- Drink only bottled or boiled water, or carbonated (bubbly) drinks in cans or bottles; avoid tap water, fountain drinks, and ice cubes; if this is not possible, make water safer by both filtering through an “absolute 1-micron or less” filter and adding iodine tablets to the filtered water (“absolute 1-micron filters” are found in camping/outdoor supply stores).
- Eat only thoroughly cooked food or fruits and vegetables you have peeled yourself. Remember: **boil it, cook it, peel it, or forget it.**
- Protect yourself from insect bites.

What you need to bring with you:

- Prescription medications sufficient for the entire trip and a copy of the prescription(s).
- Over-the-counter antidiarrheal medicine in case you have diarrhea.
- Sunblock, sunglasses, and a hat.
- Iodine tablets and water filters to purify water if bottled water is not available.
- Clothing that covers your entire body, insect repellent containing DEET, and nets for beds to avoid insect bites.

Explore the following Internet web sites for current health issues:

- World Health Organization – <http://www.who.int>
- Centers for Disease Control & Prevention - <http://www.cdc.gov>
- Department of Defense Global Emerging Infections Surveillance and Response System – www.geis.fhp.osd.mil
- Department of State - http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/tw/tw_1764.html

- DOE - <http://www.hss.doe.gov/HealthSafety/>

MEDEX Plus

Departmental elements must subscribe to this service for each employee for a designated period of time, i.e., a trip of 1-10 days, for 30 days, or for a year for frequent travelers. Employees should check with their Administrative support staffs to determine if they are covered by one of the Headquarters contracts. The following services are provided:

Medical Assistance Services

- provide 24-hour assistance for medical and travel problems
- provide worldwide medical & dental referrals
- provide close monitoring of treatment
- provide facilitation of hospital payment (Departmental element must advance funds)
- coordinate the transfer of insurance information to medical providers
- coordinate the transfer of vaccines or blood transfers with authorization
- coordinate the replacement of prescription medications
- coordinate the replacement of corrective lenses and medical devices
- dispatch an appropriate medical practitioner to the employee if needed
- coordinate the transfer of medical information and records with authorization
- provide updates to family, DOE, and physician with authorization
- coordinate hotel arrangements for convalescence

Medical Evacuation/Repatriation Services

- coordinate and pay for a medically supervised emergency evacuation if adequate medical facilities are not available
- coordinate and pay for 1-way economy airfare to the employee's point of origin following the evacuation and stabilization
- assist in obtaining the necessary clearances for cremation or the return of an employee's remains; coordinate and pay for the expenses associated with the cremation or preparation and transportation of the remains

Travel Assistance Services

- provide visa, passport, and vaccination requirements; cultural information; general temperature and weather trends; embassy and consular information; travel advisories; and country profiles
- coordinate emergency travel arrangements
- coordinate and pay for economy airfare to wherever an employee has been evacuated for an individual designated by the employee if traveling alone and hospitalized for more than 7 days
- assist in arranging cash transfers of funds
- assist with the replacement of passports, tickets, and other travel documents
- refer to attorneys and assist in securing bail bonds or other legal instruments
- provide translation assistance or referral to local interpreter services

- provide emergency messages
- provide referrals for security assistance or evacuation

Contacts

Medical clearance and health issues:

One of the Headquarters health units (FORS: 202-586-9765; GTN: 301-903-4275)

For the Office of the Secretary and anyone traveling with that staff:

MA Foreign Travel Office (202-586-5710)

MEDEX contract:

Procurement (202-287-1463)